

Pennsylvania's Merry Middle

State College Area

Location

Central Pennsylvania

Access

I-80 and I-99

Major meeting spaces

Carnegie Inn and Spa,
Penn Stater, Toftrees Golf
Resort and Conference
Center

Hotel rooms

3,300

Off-site Venues

Bill Pickle's Tap Room,
Zenos, Nittany Valley
Symphony

Contact Info

814-231-1400

www.visitpennstate.org



Photos courtesy Central PA CVB

Meeting venues throughout central Pennsylvania can accommodate groups of many different sizes.

By Molly Phillips

Pennsylvania is a house divided when it comes to sports teams.

Simply asking whether someone roots for the Eagles or the Steelers in the NFL is a relatively accurate indicator as to whether that person hails from the eastern or western part of the state. However, if there's one thing that brings Philadelphia fans and Pittsburgh fans together, it's another sports team: the Penn State Nittany Lions, who call the Pennsylvania town of State College home.

The central location of State College has served for many years as home to Pennsylvania's college sports teams. This same neutral position, which has earned the region the nickname Happy Valley, has also helped it grow over the years into a destination city for business travel.

Executive director of the Central Pennsylvania Convention and Visitor's Bureau Betsey Howell said State College's location at the intersection of interstates 80 and 99 and Pennsylvania Route 322 draws business travelers and meeting-goers from companies in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and surrounding northeast cities.

"It's also such a diverse area," said Howell. "You have State College, which is more metropolitan thanks to the

university; but drive five miles out of the town in any direction, and you're in the country."

Follow Howell's advice by taking a drive out of the college mecca, and you will discover Bellefonte, Boalsburg and Philipsburg, small towns replete with history and charm that can host an ex-officio getaway or an entire day of meeting activities.

Small and Scenic

Bellefonte, named for the freshwater spring in its center, has some of the state's oldest and most ornate Victorian-era houses; these structures combined with a historic train station and other municipal buildings make it one of the most architecturally interesting towns in the area. For planners looking to host a small meeting, conference or single event in Bellefonte, the Reynolds Mansion is an exemplary specimen of the Victorian architecture for which the town is famed. The bed-and-breakfast is equipped to serve as host for small meetings and events.

Boalsburg is home to the Tussey Mountain Resort, which hosts groups of up to 200 for conferences, events or meals in its rustic lodge. During the winter, the lodge



The Penn Stater offers an exhibit hall for trade shows.

serves as home base for skiers adventuring on the resort's nine trails. With night skiing and tubing options, a trip to the mountain makes a great excursion for the athletically inclined business group.

Philipsburg, a town of about 3,000, is the gateway to Black Moshannon State Park. This outdoor paradise is a year-round stomping ground for business groups wanting to escape from urban living altogether, offering boating, fishing, skiing and lodging options in the form of tents and rustic cabins.

Campus and Beyond

Though unique in their own right, these towns are inevitably still spokes of the hub that is State College. With people frequently traveling in and out for Penn State sporting events, college visits and, of course, business travel, this centrifuge has numerous best-in-class venue options for meetings.

"The most iconic is, as its name suggests, the Penn Stater Conference Center and Hotel," said Howell. "There's also Celebration Hall and the Carnegie Inn."

The Penn Stater has 58,000 square feet of dedicated meeting space and employs professional meeting planners on its staff. The President's Hall, the facility's largest conference room, can seat up to 1,000 people theater-style.

The resort has all the technological amenities you would expect from a major hotel chain, with a Penn State flavor. Rooms are decorated in Nittany Lion Blue, and throughout the hotel's grounds, you'll find Penn State sports memorabilia. The Legend's bar and grill,

one of the center's two dining options, even contains a wall-size timeline of the school's history.

Celebration Hall is also a popular venue for conferences in the city, where it is perched on a hillside with stunning views of Mount Nittany, from which the college's mascot derives its name. The facility has six private rooms that can be combined into two large rooms that seat 250 people each. A water garden, an outdoor balcony and a grand atrium entrance make Celebration Hall one of the most picturesque venues in State College.

The Carnegie Inn is a posh option that includes a golf course, a spa and a fine-dining restaurant. The resort's late-19th- and early-20th-century style library and boardroom are both situated next to a classically equipped bar, making networking feel like a trip back in time.

End a day or a weekend of meetings in State College the way any college student would: with decadent food from a hole-in-the-wall staple such as the Waffle Shop. Equally as iconic in the town and a tad more upscale is Spats Café and Speakeasy; the brave at heart may want to venture downstairs to the Rathskellar, a popular college bar located in the dining joint's basement.

Meeting planners looking to State College or the surrounding area can take full advantage of services offered by the Central Pennsylvania Convention and Visitor's Bureau.

"We work with meeting planners to secure RFPs from various vendors, develop tours, secure sports tickets – virtually anything a planner might need," said Howell.